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XIX. — *On the Bay of Antioch, and the Ruins of Seleucia Pieria.* By Lieutenant-Colonel CHESNEY, Royal Artillery, F.R.S. Read May 14, 1838.

THE Bay of Antioch is spacious, free from rocks, and well sheltered on every side, with the exception of the south-west, where, in the distant horizon, is seen the lofty island of Cyprus; the anchorage, however, is good, and the water deep, almost to the very beach.* This was the spot selected, in order to avoid the Beilán mountains, for the disembarkation of the party destined to proceed on the expedition to the Euphrates. On the 3rd of April, 1835, H.M.S. Columbine, followed by the George Canning, under all sail, led the way from the offing towards the anchorage. To the south, as we proceeded, was the lofty Jebel el 'Akrah, rising 5318 feet above the sea, with its abutments extending to Antioch. To the north, the Beilán range (5337 feet), well stocked with fine forest-trees, chiefly oak, walnut, and fir; and in front the broad expanse of the bay backed by the hills of Antioch, Mount St. Symeon, or Bín-kilíseh, covered with myrtle, bay, and arbutus, altogether forming a striking and magnificent Panorama. We all felt on many accounts a deep interest, as we approached the bottom of the bay. The pilot of the Columbine (a Greek), although selected as knowing this part of the coast, admitted just then, that he had never entered the bay before; and there was but one person in the expedition who had visited this part of the country, and that only by land. The vessels continued their course for a considerable time, finding no bottom with twenty-five fathoms of line; and as there was no appearance of the river Orontes, great uneasiness was felt lest we might have mistaken the intended bay; until, after some suspense, and a good deal of anxiety, the extensive line of excavations along the sides of the rocky hills behind the ruins of Seleucia were discovered to the left, but still at some distance. In less than an hour the Columbine began to shorten sail; being then in ten and a half fathoms water, and sufficiently near to the land, she hauled her wind and stood towards the south side of the bay, until the inner part of the Orontes was seen, from the topmast-head, winding towards its æstuary; which, owing to its slanting direction, was still hidden from view: both vessels then tacked, and stood towards the ruins of Seleucia, near which they anchored soon after sunset.

The southern horn of the bay of Antioch trends inwards east by north about seven miles to the beach. Near its outer extre-

* At one and a half cable's length from the beach there are three fathoms water, and it gradually deepens to seven and a half. Opposite the bar, at three quarters of a mile distant, and close to the land on the south-west side, are the best places for anchoring.

mity is the little bay or fissure called Kaşab, and three miles nearer to the main-land, that of Kará Mayor; which is rather larger, and has a good anchorage off it close in to the shore; * the rest of the distance along the foot of Mount Cassius being precipitous, and for the most part inaccessible, as far as the beach, beyond which, the range of Jebel el 'Akrab runs towards Antioch in the previous direction east by north, with the rich picturesque valley of the Orontes at the foot, and the celebrated fountain of Daphne on its slope. The bight of the bay forms an almost imperceptible curve. At four miles north by west, half west, from the foot of Cassius, is the present æstuary of the Orontes; having what is called the Custom House about one mile from the bar in a strait line east by south, and the ancient port of Antioch about a mile further.

According to the reports of the natives, as well as the appearance of the marshy ground, the river entered the sea formerly by a second branch close to the mountain on the south side, which probably formed the small island we find marked on some older maps. Eight miles and a half north by west, half west, is the other horn of the bay, which is formed by Jebel Músa; on the base of which opening north-west are the ruins of the well-known city built by Seleucus Nicator to celebrate his victory over Antigonus; but it has a much deeper interest to the Christian, from being the spot where Paul and Barnabas embarked for Cyprus.

On the eastern side of Jebel Músa is the large and scattered village of Sweidiyah, situated in a rich picturesque valley filled with fruit gardens, chiefly mulberry, † and producing a variety of good fruits, as well as the finest silk in Syria. Southward from the village is the low mountain called Bín-kiliseh, ‡ the sides of which are thickly covered with myrtles, interspersed with arbutus. On the crest of the hill are the ruins of the convent of St. Symeon Stylites. Here is part of a column of very large dimensions cut in the solid rock, and close by are the scattered fragments of the extensive convent dedicated to St. Symeon, which was destroyed in the sixth century, now almost covered with shrubs. Close at the foot of this low mountain, on the south-east side, the Orontes breaks through a deep valley, and makes a very winding course both above and below. The summit is about five miles from the sea, and commands a beautiful view westward, over a very rich plain extending to the sea, closed in by Mount Cassius to the southward, and the Jebel Músa range to the northward; whilst to the east is the valley of the Orontes, terminated by the castellated hills of Antioch; the general view being closed to the north-east

* An Egyptian sloop of war lay here at one time, and also several small merchantmen at intervals during our stay.

† The bay-tree and myrtle are particularly large; and the oranges, peaches, nectarines, and figs are particularly good.

‡ 1000 churches.

by the Beilán mountains. It was hoped that the stores might have been carried altogether by water to Antioch, but, as the river proved rapid, usually without even the assistance of a path along its bank, and there was besides little inclination to accommodate us with a temporary passage through the fish-weirs, this part of the plan was abandoned after tracking up the keelsons of both vessels only. The windings give a distance of about forty-one miles, whilst the journey by land is only sixteen miles and a half. Ibráhím Páshá talked of making the river navigable, which might be done by blasting some rocks in its bed, and by removing the wooden fish-weirs which traverse the river in several places near Antioch; it would also be necessary to cut a towing-path for horses through the woods along its banks. Lieutenant Cleaveland and the other officers were of opinion that a short tug-steamer of sufficient power would certainly go up the river to Antioch, which was, in fact, done by the Columbine's boat for the greater part of the way; and if a row of piles were to be driven into the sea, in the line of the river, extending beyond the bar, so as to enable the current of the river to carry the sand and mud farther out into deep water, the Orontes would then admit vessels of 200 tons, instead of being obstructed by a bar, over which there is a depth of water of from three and a half to nine feet, in winter. At any rate, it might be made navigable for boats, as the average fall of the river between Antioch and the sea scarcely exceeds five feet and a half per mile; and boats would then go twenty-seven miles above the town to Murád Páshá, and different parts of the lake of Antioch.

Alí Páshá, the present governor of Bagdad (once governor of Aleppo), had, however, a different project, when he turned his thoughts to the means of increasing the commercial prosperity of this part of Turkey. The foundation of his plan was to be the restoration of the once magnificent port of Seleucia, the masonry of which is still in so good a state, that it merely requires trifling repairs in some places, and to be cleared out, which might have been done for about 31,000*l.*, and partially for 10,000*l.** On the south side of the entrance there is a very substantial jetty, formed of large blocks of stone secured by iron cramps. It runs north-west for seventy yards to the sea, and it may still be traced curving more to the north under water, and overlapping the northern jetty, which is in a more ruinous state, but appears to have taken the direction of W.S.W., forming a kind of basin with a narrow entrance tolerably well protected, and altogether suited for the Roman galleys. The ancient flood-gates are about fifty yards east of the south pier. The passage for the galleys, &c., is cut through the solid rock, on which are the remains of a defensive tower on each side; apartments below, with the remains of staircases to the

* According to the estimate of Mr. Vincent Germain.

top of each, are sufficiently distinct, as well as the places where the gates had been suspended between the towers.

Immediately on passing the gateway the passage widens to about 100 yards; it takes the direction of S.E. by E. between two solid walls of masonry for 350 yards, to the entrance of the great basin, which is now closed by a garden-wall. The port or basin is an irregular oval of about 450 yards long by 350 in width at the southern extremity, and rather more than 200 at the northern. The surrounding wall is formed of large cut stones solidly put together, and now rising only about seven feet above the mud, which during the lapse of ages has gradually accumulated so as to cover probably about eight feet above the original level. The exterior side of the basin is about one-third of a mile from the sea; the interior is close to the foot of the hill. The walls of the suburb touch the south-western extremity of the basin, and extend S. by E. from thence parallel to the sea for three quarters of a mile, when they turn eastward for the same distance, flanked at short intervals by square towers. These walls form a triangle, touching the basin at one end, and the walls of the principal city at the other, so as to inclose what is described by Polybius, and subsequently by Pococke, as the market-place and suburbs.* The walls of the interior part of the city appear to have had, as usual in Roman fortresses, a double line of defence, sweeping round to the north, where they rest against the hill, which seems to have had a castellated citadel on its summit. On the S.E. side of the walls is the Gate of Antioch, adorned with pilasters and defended by towers: this entrance must have been very handsome: near it, and parallel to the walls, are the remains of a double row of marble columns. The space within the walls of the town and suburbs, which have a circumference altogether of about four miles, is filled with the ruins of houses. A short distance from the town, on the east side, are the remains of a large amphitheatre tolerably distinct. About fourteen rows of seats may be traced in a semicircular form, filling up the whole of the valley in which the amphitheatre is placed, with its opening to the west commanding a fine view of the bay. To the S.E. and behind the hill (on which is the amphitheatre) are the remains of two temples; the fragments of pilasters, shafts, &c., are numerous; one seems to have been of the Corinthian order, in good taste, but I could not make out the plan of either of the buildings. The range of hills behind the ruins extends almost two miles, and contains, along its sides as well as in the valleys, numerous excavations, which are almost continuous throughout this distance. Generally speaking, they form only a single row and of small size, but occasionally

* Pococke, vol. ii. p. 184.

there is a second line of them, above or below the others, for part of the distance. These grottoes (evidently sepulchral) are generally of two kinds; the larger about twelve feet long by seven wide, having the front supported by pilasters left in excavating the solid rock, and within are three niches for bodies, viz., one on each side and one at the back of the same dimensions, viz., two feet and a half high and the same width, with a raised place left in the niche, of solid stone about four inches high, like a pillow for the head to rest upon: these niches are sometimes arched, but generally flat above. The smaller grottoes have a niche at each side with a narrow space between them. One set of grottoes is called the Tomb of the Kings; it consists of a façade-entrance and several apartments one within the other, with columns and a staircase leading to another range of rooms above. In addition to these, which are the most striking, there is another single grotto of large dimensions in one of the valleys along the side of the hill: this excavation is 100 paces by 60 wide and 25 high in the centre, the rock being excavated so as to form an arch springing from the ground on each side, that is, without side-walls. In addition to these sepulchral grottoes, of which some hundreds cover the face of the hills and all their valleys, there are many sarcophagi scattered about in every direction, always of good workmanship and tolerably perfect; although they have been opened in almost every instance probably in search of money.

But the most striking part of the interesting remains at Seleucia is a very extensive excavation cut through the solid rock from the north-eastern extremity of the town, almost to the sea;—part of which is a deep hollow way, and the remainder regular tunnels—executed with great skill and considerable labour.

In following the line from its eastern to its western extremity, a distance of 1088 yards, we have, in the first place, a hollow way of 600 feet long by 22 wide, through compact tertiary lime-stone, and of different heights at the sides, as it enters the hill. Next to this we have a regular tunnel, 293 feet by 22 wide, and 24 high. Then follows a second hollow way, 204 feet by 22, having on its south side an aqueduct cut in the rock 18 inches wide, which takes its departure from the bottom of the passage; and, by continuing onwards almost level, whilst the excavation itself descends by a more rapid slope, it reaches the surface eventually, and is carried southward to supply water to the town. In this portion of the cut which is 110 feet high, and narrowing towards the top, there is a narrow stone staircase from the surface to about 14 feet from the bottom; which probably was the usual water line. The opening above is well shaded by trees overhanging the aperture, which give it a very picturesque effect. The hollow way just mentioned is succeeded by a second tunnel 102 feet long by 25 feet 6 inches

wide, and nearly the same height. After this it again becomes a hollow way for 190 feet of the same width, but in some places attaining the height of 110 feet, or even more; and there is a very beautiful arched aqueduct passing from one side to the other at a height which now is lessened to 50 feet. From the excavation it continues a hollow way of 17 feet 6 inches wide and 41 high, for 750 feet; where are some tombs excavated in the rock at the top, and close on the N. side of the aperture; which continues 125 feet farther to an opening in the rock on the S. side of the excavation, through which the water seems to have forced itself over a rocky, broken, and steep descent directly into the great basin. Hitherto the cut has had the general direction of W. $\frac{1}{2}$ S., but it now sweeps gradually round to the northward, and after a course of 325 feet, it is crossed by an arch bearing some inscriptions scarcely to be made out. The remainder of the hollow is 427 feet long, 30 feet high, and 17 feet wide, still sweeping N. until it terminates abruptly at about 30 feet above the level of the sea: the bottom of the rest of the excavation is tolerably regular, but in this portion it is impeded by large masses of rock lying across it at intervals.

The termination is, as has been remarked already, abrupt and very imperfect; nor are there any marks of the steps mentioned by Polybius, or any other regular communication either from the excavation to the basin or even to its entrance at the piers; but as the rocks are broken away in the latter direction, and as the action of the water has carried away every thing like art in the former, it is by no means impossible that there may have been at one time a flight of steps from the flood-gate to the hollow way; and also a regular channel available at pleasure, descending from the broken aperture, so as to give a rush of water to clear out the port. The Romans were not accustomed to leave such works as this must have been in an imperfect state; such a fine basin as the inner port of Seleucia would naturally receive every kind of attention they could bestow upon what was most likely the winter harbour of their galleys; for the piers were so constructed as to form an outer harbour during the summer season. Opinions are divided about the object of this great work. Some have thought it was for defence, others that it was a mere road to avoid the hill when passing from the sea to the east side of the town, while some fancy it was intended expressly to clean out the mouth of the port. As a defensive object it must have been comparatively useless, since the cut or ditch may be passed along the hill above the two tunnels, and also by means of the bridges; added to which, there is not any flanking defence whatever, which seems to be necessary even if it were but a road, in which case an easier line could have been selected along the foot of the hill directly through the city. Pococke says it was a water-course, and gives as a proof—the native

name "Garez," which I find in the Turkish dictionary explained "a subterraneous channel to convey water." Pococke adds, "the water formerly ran through it, but now it does not go that way unless after great floods. It is said that the Arabs, coming into these parts, turned the water to the north-west, where I saw it run by a sort of subterraneous passage. The stream also in some parts takes its old course, though stone walls were built, which are still standing, to turn it another way." There was a stream running through it when I visited these ruins in 1832, and the water then ran along the excavation as far as the broken place, through which it made its way towards the old basin precisely as it did in the time of Pococke: I am therefore inclined to believe, with him, that it must have been really a water-course in any case, but whether to clear the entrance of the port, or simply to collect the several springs and rivulets rising in the hills above the city, (so as to command a supply,) is not so easily determined. There are, however, remains of other water-courses cut in the hills in the direction of the houses. This city was besieged, stormed, and taken by Antiochus the Great. The environs of Seleucia would have been still more celebrated in modern times had it not been for the campaign in Russia. In 1811 Napoleon had prepared a fleet at Toulon which was to have disembarked a large force in this bay, and Mr. Vincent Germain was waiting at Antioch for the expected troops, which had in the mean time been marched to Russia instead of taking the route from Suweidíyah to India. Mar'ash was to have been the centre of the operations, probably on account of the fine forests near that town; but as the Beilán Mountains would have furnished plenty of fine timber close at hand, it is not likely that this great Captain would have gone to Mar'ash when 110 miles through Antioch and Aleppo would have placed him at Beles, 200 miles lower down the river; for, although the details of the proposed operations are not known, there is every reason to presume that Napoleon meant to carry his troops down the river Euphrates to Başrah, which was to have been made his first *place d'armes*; and when it is recollected that the fine harbour of Grane (Korein) is within one day's march, he would, in all likelihood, have pushed on thither immediately, with a view to the gradual acquisition of Abú Shehr, Bahrein, Maskat, Kishm, and the other numerous ports on both sides of the Persian Gulf, by gradual movements along the coasts from one place to the other; the Russian campaign however put an end to this, and indeed all his other projects; and the line of the river Euphrates still belongs to our old ally Sultán Mahmúd.
